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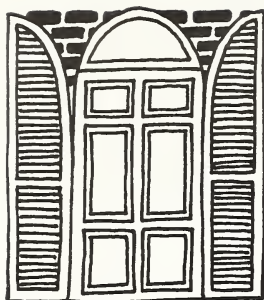
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agricultural situation

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • STATISTICAL REPORTING SERVICE

SOLID GAINS IN RURAL HOUSING





SOLID GAINS IN RURAL HOUSING

It's a success story of sorts. In 25 years, the quality of rural housing has improved markedly—faster, in fact, than in urban areas.

Yet rural housing conditions still trail those of America's cities and suburbs, with blacks, the poor, and the elderly occupying a disproportionate share of substandard dwellings.

USDA economists say that the years 1950 to 1975 saw a 71-percent hike in the number of housing units throughout the United States—while the population increased by 42 percent.

Rural Americans claimed the edge in this category, with 51 percent more units to house 21 percent more people. Metro residents, in comparison, watched their housing inventory leap by 83 percent, but had fewer units to go around as the urban population swelled by more than 50 percent.

Housing progress, of course, has to be measured in more than sheer numbers. The quarter century following 1950 also witnessed a dramatic improvement in the *quality* of American dwellings. During that time, the number of households living in substandard housing dropped from over 15 million to less than 4 million, or fewer than 5 percent of all U.S. households.

The authorities, incidentally, classify a unit as substandard if it is

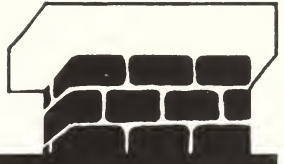
dilapidated or it lacks one or more of the following: hot running water, a flush toilet for private use, and a bathtub or shower for private use.

By this classification, progress weighs decisively in favor of rural residents. The number of occupied nonmetro units considered below standard shrank by 79 percent, versus 69 percent in urban areas. But there's a catch: rural areas claimed roughly half of all occupied substandard units in 1975, even though only 32 percent of the population lived there.

Crowded living conditions have also eased since 1950, when more than 6.5 million housing units contained more than one person for each room. By 1975, that figure had dropped by nearly 3 million, with areas beyond the city limits making the most headway.

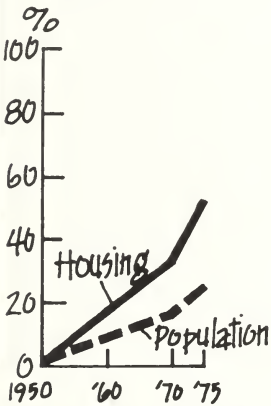
Assuming that home values are an indication of housing quality, statistics give further evidence of improved conditions throughout the United States. In constant 1950 dollars, the number of single family homes valued at over \$12,000 more than quadrupled from 1950 to 16.3 million in 1975.

Once again, rural areas took the lead. During the 25-year period, the number of homes valued at less than \$4,000 (constant dollars) declined in nonmetro areas while turning higher in the cities and suburbs.

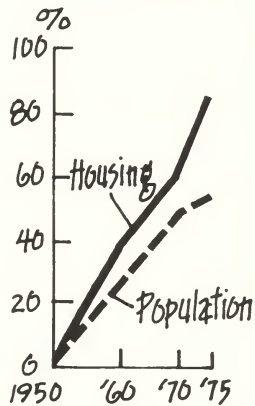


Since 1950, the number of U.S. housing units has grown faster than the population, with rural areas claiming the lead...

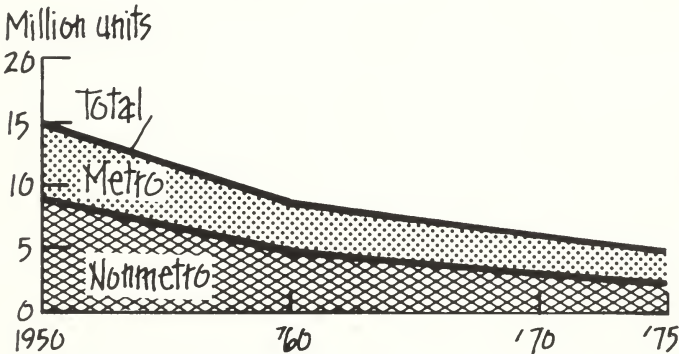
• Nonmetro •

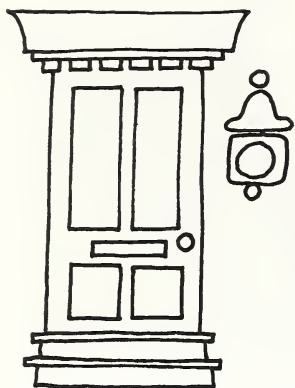


• Metro •



...while substandard dwellings have declined drastically in both rural and urban areas.





The number of households living in single unit structures is also a common yardstick of housing density. In 1975, nearly three-fourths of all U.S. households lived in single family dwellings (including mobile homes), compared with two-thirds in 1950.

The popularity of single units peaked in 1960, retreated during the rest of the decade, then climbed again during the 1970's. While relative differences in population density and land costs may account for much of the disparity, close to 90 percent of all rural households lived in single family units in 1975, versus 66 percent in metro centers.

A number of factors have contributed to housing gains over the past 25 years. Chief among them: increased incomes, a brisk pace in new home construction, and stepped-up financial aid from Federal, State, and local governments.

As for income, rural households with adjusted earnings of less than \$2,000 (constant 1950 dollars) dropped from just over 7 million in 1950 to close to 5 million in 1975. At the same time, households with incomes greater than \$4,000 increased fourfold.

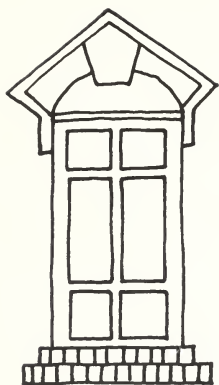
Tied to income growth was an expanding rate of new home construction. Rural housing completions averaged about 417,000 a year during the 1950's, climbed to

474,000 units during the 1960's, then jumped to a yearly rate of 658,000 during the first half of the 1970's.

Business recessions, however, frequently slowed expansion in the housing industry. During the recessions of 1956 and 1957, homebuilding in rural areas declined 7 percent. Expansion over the next decade was capped by a 14-percent drop in 1966. From then until 1973, housing production expanded rapidly until it nearly doubled the 1966 level. But by 1975, housing completions had skidded 42 percent below the '73 mark.

The recession in 1974 and 1975 hit mobile homes harder than conventional single units or multiples. The impact was probably felt more in rural areas, where mobile homes make up a larger share of total housing. Last year, however, mobile home construction advanced at a faster clip than conventional homebuilding.

Government assistance also spurred housing improvements over the past quarter century. Generally, this assistance has taken the form of making credit more readily available through insured or guaranteed loans to private citizens or groups. The extent of this help has varied from a low of 12 percent of the rural homes built in 1964 to a high of 34 percent in 1970. Since the early 1970's, the government has helped finance the construction of just over



a fourth of all units built in rural America.

Farm housing got a boost from the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), which helped construct about 6,000 units a year from 1950 to 1973. In 1973, FCA got authorization to make housing loans to rural non-farm borrowers living in towns with fewer than 2,500 people. Since then, FCA nearly doubled its housing loan volume.

Meantime, loans from the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) emerged as the top source of Federal help in rural areas during the 1970's. Back in the 1950's, when FmHA could only help farmers improve their housing, it financed the building of only about 2,000 new units a year.

The following decade, FmHA's program expanded to include rural nonfarm households in the open country and villages and towns with less than 5,500 people...and housing construction loans climbed to about 16,000 a year.

The 1970's brought further expansion, and an extension of the areas served. As a result, FmHA loans helped build an average of 77,000 units a year. Types of loans included those for ownership, home repair, rural rental housing, and farm labor housing.

Better housing conditions brought about by bigger incomes, more new

homes, and government help, however, have not been shared equally by all sectors of society.

During the 25-year period, housing conditions for rural blacks did not improve as rapidly as for whites. By 1975, in fact, black households occupied a sharply increased proportion of all substandard housing in rural America, even though they occupied a smaller share of the housing there.

The 25-year span nonetheless saw a marked improvement in housing conditions for rural blacks. In 1950, for example, 96 percent of the non-metro housing occupied by blacks was substandard. By 1975, the share stood at less than a third.

Like blacks, the aged form another group who have not shared equally in better housing conditions. People over 65 occupy a larger share of U.S. housing than 25 years ago, and an even bigger proportion of the below-standard housing in both the countryside and the Nation's cities.

Mainly responsible for this growth, however, are senior citizens who are heads of households and live either alone or share a home with people other than relatives. In contrast, the number of family households headed by a person over 65 and living in substandard quarters has shown little change since 1950.

NEW SHAPES, NEW MACHINE

Apple orchards of the future may be filled with boxy or angular shaped trees rather than conventionally pruned ones.

The purpose is twofold. First the new shapes would permit greater penetration of sunlight to enhance fruit production. Square or Y-shaped trees would also accommodate a newly designed over-the-row harvester.

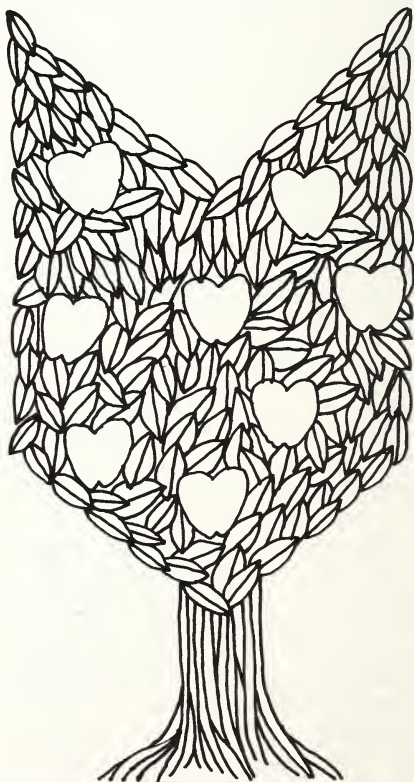
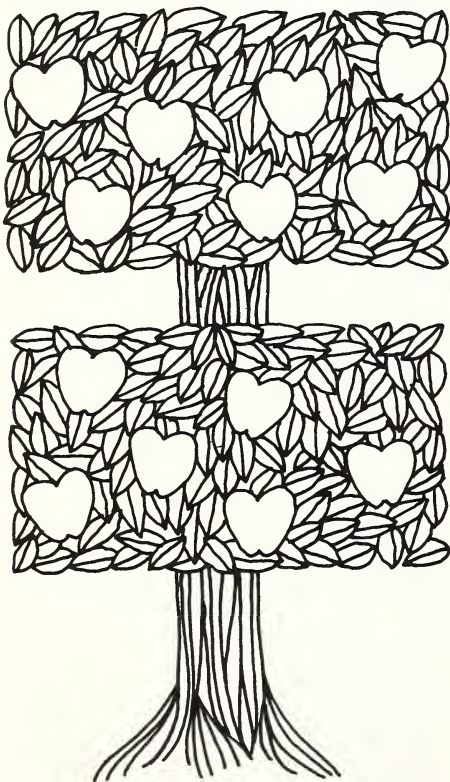
USDA's Agricultural Research Service is collaborating with scientists involved in fruit production and with equipment manufacturers and growers. Their goal is a completely mechanized system that will harvest as well as prune, spray, and apply growth retardants and herbicides.

Tree height and width would be pruned to allow maximum sunlight

and to fit dimensions of the machines. Researchers have found, for example, that apple trees should be a maximum of 10 feet high by 6 feet wide to let in the sun's rays at an angle of 45° or higher. Also, there should be at least 4 feet of open space between the outer edges of the trees.

The harvesting machine, with a frame shaped much like an inverted U, would move down a row straddling the boxy trees. Other orchard operations could be performed by the same machine by applying attachments.

Moving over the trees, the harvester would look like a mechanical monster devouring entire trees in its path. But with a series of catching and shaking devices, this futuristic forager would gently deposit fruit into empty bins following the



harvester. There may even be a provision for salvaging any fruit that drops to the ground during harvesting.

Working as a pruner, the machine could remove branches and shred them for mulch. At the same time, it could apply a growth-retardant spray to inhibit excessive top growth after pruning, while another part of the system sprays insecticides and fungicides.

In traditional spraying operations, roughly 95 percent of the insecticide drifts away, causing waste and polluting surrounding areas. But when rigged for spraying, the new multi-purpose

harvester can contain and recirculate about 75 percent of the excess.

The machine's greatest appeal would be easy maneuverability in high-yielding orchards planted on gentle slopes.

Minimum requirements include a yield of 678 bushels per acre, machine loss of less than 20 percent, and high quality maintained in fruit harvested from the box-shaped trees. If all requirements are met, this multiple-use machine could reduce the grower's investment in other orchard equipment: Even carrying an \$800,000 price tag, the powered frame and all attachments would be economically feasible.

NOT ONLY CROP REPORTS

Regular users of crop and livestock reports may not know that SRS also collects data on topics ranging from possible pollution from agriculture in the Great Lakes Basin to predator losses suffered by Western sheep ranchers.

These surveys are taken at the request of, and paid for by, other USDA or Federal and State agencies who rely on SRS for the raw information they need.

Quite often, SRS can fill these requests by adding questions to its usual cycle of crop and livestock surveys. But some instances call for a special survey, particularly when a situation arises that demands prompt attention.

Earlier this year, for example, farmers in a nine-State area began experiencing increasing financial problems in the wake of drought, sagging wheat and livestock prices, and rising production costs. To determine the extent of the problem for the Department of Agriculture, SRS responded with a quick survey of 400 bankers in the affected States.

This past summer, SRS contacted some 900 farmers in the Great Lakes Basin to get their opinions on water

pollution from agriculture and efforts to curb it. Most producers welcomed the chance to voice their opinions in this special survey for the Soil Conservation Service and Environmental Protection Agency.

The Commodities Futures Trading Commission also looked to SRS when it wanted to know how actively farmers trade in commodity futures. The findings: less than 6 percent of all farmers with average annual sales of \$10,000 or more were traders.

At a Department of Labor request, SRS makes a quarterly count of Puerto Rico's farm labor force. The Labor Department used the data to apportion funds set aside by Congress to aid farm workers.

Regularly scheduled surveys, however, provide much of the specialized data collected expressly for other agencies.

State-funded surveys conducted by SRS field offices cover an even wider range of subjects. For example recent efforts included a Kentucky horse inventory, a pump irrigation energy survey in Texas, and a survey of blackbird damage as reported by farmers in Tennessee.

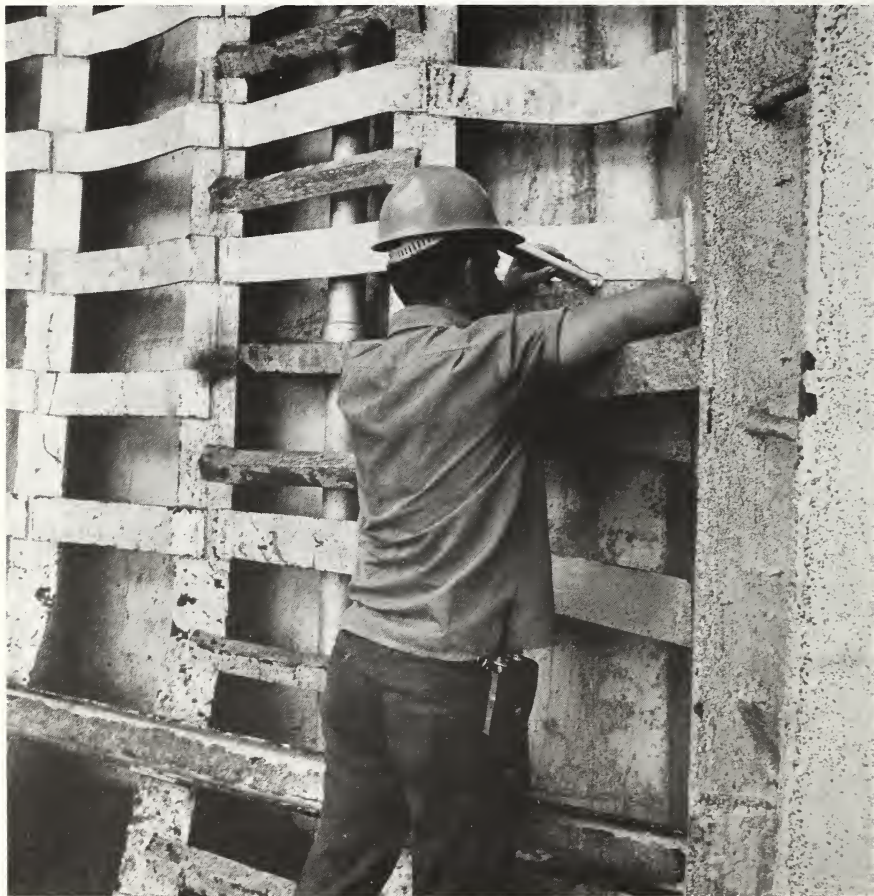
TIGHTER WATCH ON GRAIN

Farmers are justifiably proud of the grain they produce and of its contribution to the Nation's export receipts. Last year, grain stood as the No. 1 source of U.S. export income, bringing home more than \$14 billion in foreign currencies and providing roughly two-thirds of the value of all American farm exports.

But when grain shipments reach foreign shores in unacceptable condition or in less-than-bargained-for amounts, it reflects poorly on the good name of American exports—and on the integrity of the U.S. farmer. To prevent short weighing, misgrading, and other abuses from tarnishing this image, USDA has launched a massive effort to revamp its grain inspection and weighing system.

Authority for the job rests with the new Federal Grain Inspection Service, which has begun hiring and training a large force of inspectors and weighers to keep close check of the quality of grain moving through our sea-ports and major inland terminals such as Minneapolis and St. Louis.

Time, of course, will be the ultimate judge of how successful the project is, but reports already indicate fewer complaints from our customers overseas.





Deep in the hold of a ship, an inspector checks for cleanliness, making sure the area is free of insects and other contaminants before the vessel takes on its cargo of grain.

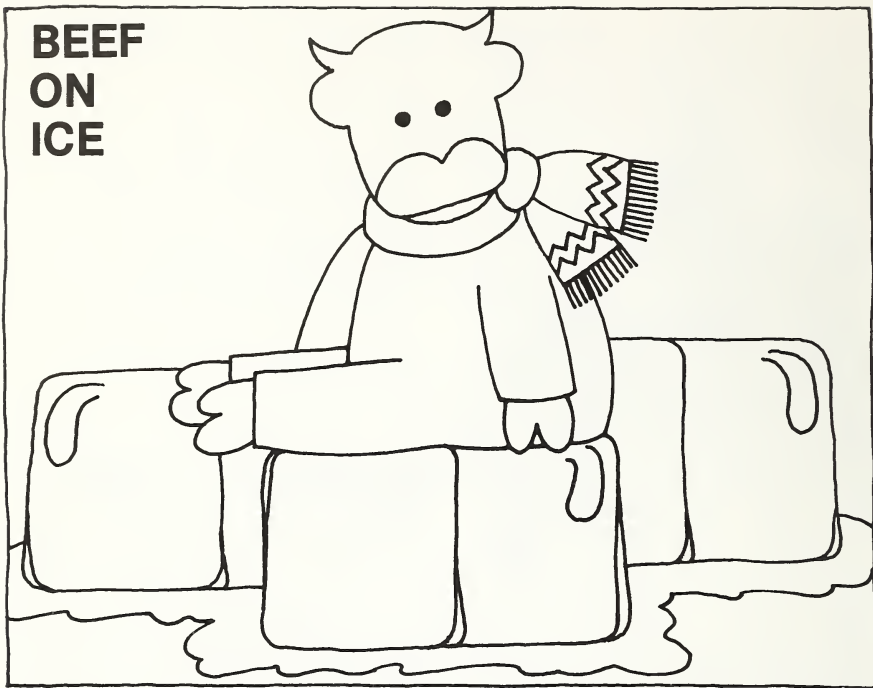
Trainee inspectors sharpen their skills using a probe to pull grain samples from a rail hopper car.

Spread out atop the hopper car for close scrutiny, grain samples from each opening in the probe represent a different depth in the rail car's load.

Two-way radios help inspection crews get instructions about the next load of grain or to report problems.



BEEF ON ICE



Packages of centrally processed and frozen beef may greet the food shopper in ever-growing numbers. Getting around initial consumer resistance to new merchandising techniques could slow the pace, but retail outlets now lean increasingly toward meat-handling methods that involve earlier cutting.

USDA's Economic Research Service estimates that up to 6 cents per retail pound of beef could be saved if retailers would cut and package meat at central warehouses instead of at the store.

Traditional beef-handling had the wholesaler shipping carcass meat to stores where it was cut to retail sizes. The system proved costly because of transport of excess fat and bone, the need to merchandise the whole carcass, and the inefficiency of nonassembly-line cutting.

However, the last 15 years have brought changes. By 1974, only 28 percent of all beef shipped to supermarkets arrived in carcass form. Nearly a fourth of the fresh beef was

"boxed," a process in which packers do a portion of the work.

They carve the carcass into primals (round, for example) or sub-primals (top round, sirloin tip), vacuum-wrap the cuts, and place them in cartons for shipment. Industry officials estimate that 80 percent of the beef entering retail stores will be in noncarcass form by 1980.

Initial enthusiasm for lowering costs by using boxed beef may have been over-optimistic, however. On average, boxed beef costs about the same as a retailer doing the work at his regional warehouse. When retailers and packers are far apart—say 1,000 miles—the boxed method becomes more attractive.

Though the new processes may slow meat price increases, economists warn that there would be no significant drop at the cash register. Retail beef prices are expected to climb 5 to 6 percent during the latter half of this year. A trend upward will continue in 1978 because of lower per capita beef supplies.

Nonetheless, both fresh and frozen centralized cutting provide a key to more efficient use of the carcass. There is better utilization of fat and bone trim; greater product uniformity; improved sanitation; and reduced handling, packaging, and transportation costs. In addition, frozen beef maintains its product freshness and reduces the amount of shrinkage.

However, dampening retailers' zeal is the fact that acceptance of the store-frozen product has been only locally successful, even though a 1976 market survey showed 80 percent of beef-buying shoppers who purchase 1-3 days in advance freeze the meat at home. In fact, frozen beef sales claimed only 1 percent of the market in 1974.

This share may rise, though, as independent stores specializing in convenience foods rely more heavily on frozen meat. The food service industry, a prime buyer, has boosted sales. In 1969, \$884 million was spent on frozen meat, 61 percent by restaurants, hotels, institutions, and other food service outlets.

In 1975, hamburger alone accounted for 57 percent of sales of the \$63 billion-a-year fast food industry, and steak for 17 percent.

Hamburger, in fact, has led the trend toward central processing. In 1974, 42 percent of the ground beef delivered to retail outlets had been warehouse processed—double the level 2 years earlier. One expert predicts that stores will get 71 percent of their ground beef from central sources by 1980.

But aside from hamburger, totally centralized beef cutting remains a pioneering technique. By 1980, its share of retail deliveries could reach 10 percent. USDA economists believe fresh frozen meat will be taking a larger share of the beef market, especially in convenience stores. Another possibility is in specific cuts rather than a full line.

FARMING'S SHARE

Watchdogs of U.S. trade have frequently looked to farm exports as a means of easing the bottom line into the black.

In 6 of the past 10 years, the United States has posted a favorable balance of trade, with foreign payments for American merchandise erasing the red ink of imports. But in 4 of those years it was farm exports alone that kept our trade balance from slipping into the minus column, since the United States bought more than it sold in nonagricultural goods.

In 1968, for example, imports of nonfarm items outweighed export sales by \$562 million. But a farm trade surplus of nearly \$1.2 billion kept the Nation in the black.

The same situation occurred the following year, and again in 1973 and 1975. The 1975 tallies were the most spectacular: farm exports valued at nearly \$22 billion helped offset a nonfarm trade deficit of \$3.6 billion, leaving the United States a total trade surplus of \$9 billion.

But last year the tables turned. The nonagricultural trade deficit leaped by nearly \$18 billion and total imports rose by about \$24 billion, against an export gain of less than \$8 billion. The upshot: the U.S. trade balance sank into the red by over \$9 billion.

Meantime agriculture's net contribution to the balance of trade also declined as farm imports rose by \$1.6 billion, offsetting a roughly \$1 billion increase in total farm exports.

Nonetheless, U.S. agriculture "did its share" by posting a healthy \$12 billion surplus, thereby stopping the total trade balance from slipping even further.

Agriculture's net contribution, incidentally, is based on commercial exports as well as noncommercial shipments, including those under P.L. 480 and other programs.

Briefings

RECENT REPORTS BY USDA OF ECONOMIC, MARKETING, AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING FARMERS.

WORKWEEK. . . More than 5 million people toiled on the Nation's farms during the SRS survey week of July 10-16, 1977. This was 7% fewer than last year. Farm operators plus unpaid family members working 15 hours or more numbered nearly 3.2 million, while hired workers totaled slightly less than 1.9 million. Working in the fields and with livestock occupied almost 1.4 million hands. Payday brought an average of \$2.77 an hour for all methods of pay during the survey week, up from last year's \$2.53. Hourly workers paid only in cash wages averaged \$2.81 per hour, 29 cents more than a year ago, while wages for field and livestock workers combined brought \$2.56, up 19 cents. Putting time into production meant the longest hours for unpaid family members—38.6 hours for the week. Farm operators averaged 38.4 hours while hired help worked 35.5 hours, up a bit from 1976's 35.1.

AND IN ALASKA. . . A first-time survey of Alaskan farm labor showed 830 workers during the July 10-16 survey week. Some 530 were farm operators and unpaid family members devoting 15 hours or more to farmwork. The remaining 300 hired workers clocked an average of just over 28 hours during the week—versus nearly 40 for operators and family members—bringing in an average hourly rate of \$4.86. Total field and livestock workers numbered 220, or nearly 75% of the State's hired farm labor force.

FARM CREDIT CLIMBS. . . The Cooperative Farm Credit System loaned farmers and their cooperatives more than \$37 billion for the year ended June 30, 1977. This was up nearly 14% from a year ago, according to the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), which supervises the Cooperative Farm Credit System and its borrower-owned institutions. More than \$40 billion in outstanding loans were on the books at year's end, up nearly 6% from June 1976. FCA officials point to escalating farm land prices and costs of financing commodities held by marketing cooperatives as the reason for the increased loan volume. Farmers slowed down borrowing on new equipment and other short- and intermediate-term items. The reason—lower income prospects.

AND THE WINNER IS. . . A lottery will determine who may import cattle through USDA's new import center under construction in Fleming Key, Fla. Twice a year, and after a 90-day notice, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will hold a public drawing to award import permits to 400 U.S. cattle breeders. Each "winner" can bring in one animal. APHIS decided on the lottery system after public comment indicated it would be the most equitable way to distribute the permits. Scheduled to open in 1979, the Fleming Key center will screen cattle entering the U.S. from countries where livestock ailments such as foot-and-mouth disease and rinderpest still exist. APHIS officials point out that the U.S. has not imported cattle from these places since 1930. The cattle will be thoroughly tested at an overseas embarkation point before reaching the high security, offshore facility on the Key West Naval Base. After arrival, the animals will be isolated an additional 5 months for further testing.

HOLD THE LETTUCE. . . Shredded lettuce has found new life—at least 2 more weeks. Scientists with USDA's Agricultural Research Service have developed several methods to increase storage life for restaurants, institutions, and fast-food chains that buy it in ready-to-use form. When shredded lettuce is shipped and stored at 34° F, marketability is retained for 26 days compared with the more common 10 days at 50°. Other factors that help maintain freshness include airtight containers which add 50% more shelf life than common polyethylene bags, sanitary preparation and storage in a dry place to reduce bacteria, and sharp utensils for shredding to eliminate life-shortening physical damage.

. . .AND THE NUTS AND GRAINS. . . A new packaging technique out of the National Peanut Research Laboratory in Dawson, Ga., can add months to the shelf life of nuts and such hard-to-keep cereal grains as brown rice. Agricultural Research Service scientists developed a simple and economical process that takes advantage of the carbon dioxide-absorbing characteristics of the seeds. Nuts or grain are placed in a plastic bag impervious to gas, flushed with carbon dioxide, and heat-sealed. Within 24 hours the seeds absorb the gas, leaving a vacuum. Raw peanuts treated this way stayed fresh for at least 8 months while roasted peanuts kept their freshness up to 4 months. This process could be applied to production-line packaging of small retail and larger bulk containers.

PUBLICIZING PVP. . . Plant Variety Protection is the topic of a leaflet newly revised by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). The Plant Variety Protection Act encourages development of new plant varieties to the ultimate benefit of farmers, gardeners, and consumers. More than 400 different seed-produced plants---field crops,

vegetables, and flowers—have been issued certificates under the plant variety protection program enacted in 1970. The new publication explains what the program means for plant breeders, how applications for protection are made, and the costs. A single free copy of *Plant Variety Protection—How It Works for You*, PA-1191, may be obtained from the Office of Communication, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

JOINT PROJECT TAKES COUNTRY ROAD. . . Rural people in 29 counties will be taking part in rebuilding and improvement projects set up by the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Four States will receive \$40 million from USDA's Farmers Home Administration and \$3 million from HUD to rehabilitate housing, construct new homes, and winterize dwellings. Aimed at people in the "hard to reach" lower income brackets, the program will also include water and sewer projects and other community development activities. All work will be carried out by the States and monitored by the Federal Government. Of 30 States applying for the project, the final choices were: 13 counties in north central and southeastern Illinois, six in southern West Virginia, six in southern Colorado, and four in northern California.

MISSISSIPPI MUD. . . USDA's Sedimentation Laboratory in Oxford, Miss., and two of the State's universities have received \$650,000 from the Army Corps of Engineers to study streambank stability. The 4-year cooperative agreement will allow scientists to evaluate how various factors affect the stability of waterways on bluffline watersheds in Mississippi's Yazoo basin. Researchers will investigate sediment transport, erosion, soil-water movement, and low-drop grade control structures. The goal—to find out why channel banks fail and how land management can help prevent erosion and caving.

RESIDUE VIOLATIONS. . . The percentage of illegal chemical residues in meat and poultry increased during the April-June quarter of 1977, according to USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS). Of 4,935 samples analyzed, 252 showed violations. Chief offender was sulfa drug residues in swine, which climbed 4% from the previous quarter to 216 violations out of 1,606 samples. Red meats containing illegal residues numbered 34 of 2,408, and poultry only 2 of 921 samples tested. FSQS officials said that residue violations occur when producers using medicated feeds fail to switch their animals to nonmedicated rations for the recommended time before marketing. They urge producers to rigidly follow the prescribed withdrawal periods and to thoroughly clean feed bins when making the changeover. Although there is no indication that low levels of sulfa and other residues cause harm to humans, USDA keeps close watch on the general meat supply.

Statistical Barometer

Item	1975	1976	1977—latest available data	
Farm Food Market Basket:¹				
Retail cost (1967=100)	174	175	180	July
Farm value (1967=100)	187	179	181	July
Farmer's share of retail cost (percent)	42	40	39	July
Agricultural Trade:				
Agricultural exports (\$bil.)	22	23	1.7	July
Agricultural imports (\$bil.)	10	11	1.0	July
Farm Production and Efficiency:				
Farm output, total (1967=100)	114	117	119	Sept.
Crops (1967=100)	121	122	125	Sept.
Livestock (1967=100) ²	101	106	108	Sept.
Cropland used for crops (1967=100)	108	109	110	Sept.
Crop production per acre (1967=100)	112	112	114	Sept.
Farm Income:				
Volume of farm marketings (1967=100)	115	121	113	June
Cash receipts from farm marketings (\$bil.)	88.1	94.3	99.0	(²)
Realized gross farm income (\$bil.)	96.7	103.6	108.8	(²)
Production expense (\$bil.)	75.9	81.7	87.1	(²)
Realized net farm income (\$bil.)	20.8	21.9	21.7	(²)
Income and Spending:				
Disposable personal income (\$bil.)	1,084.4	1,185.8	1,292.5	(²)
Expenditures for food (\$bil.)	184.8	199.5	216.9	(²)
Farm Employment and Wage Rates:³				
Total employment (1967=100)	89	89	82	July
Family labor (1967=100)	83	83	78	July
Hired labor (1967=100)	92	97	89	July
Wage rates (1967=100)	190	208	231	July

¹Average annual quantities per family and single person households bought by wage and clerical workers, 1960-61, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics figures.

²Annual rate, seasonally adjusted, second quarter.

³Seasonally adjusted.

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